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What Does The Torah Say About Lesbians?

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What Does The Torah Say About Lesbians?

What does The Torah say about lesbians? While many religious people lump all homosexuals into one group, you may be surprised to find that the Biblical text does not lump women and men into the same category with regard to homosexuality. Thus, many people do not know what the text says

about lesbians.

What Does The Torah Say About Lesbians?

So, what does The Torah say about lesbians? You may be surprised to learn that the answer is nothing. The Torah speaks specifically of males lying with males, as with a woman. It never speaks of women lying with other women.

Why Were Lesbians Excluded From The Torah?

There are many theories as to why The Torah does not mention homosexual acts between women. Some scholars attempted to say this was because the book was chauvinistic and women were excluded from The Law. However, this theory has largely been dismissed, because there are laws specifically for women.

Most Likely Reason

Another theory is that lesbians are not mentioned because sex between two women does not result in the loss of "seed." That is to say, a woman's eggs are not expelled during the sexual act as is a man's semen. Thus, the act does not threaten the continuation of the Jewish line in the same manner. This is the most popular theory in modern scholarship. I will discuss this later in the article when we explore Orthodox beliefs.

Frederick E. Greenspahn (https://saupj.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/homosexuality-bible.pdf) wrote,

> "The absence of references to lesbianism in the Bible is noteworthy.
>
> (The rabbinic prohibition is based on the biblical proscription of imitating Egyptian and Canaanite practices.)27 This cannot be written off as the result of biblical androcentrism, since females are mentioned alongside males in other prohibitions (e.g., Lev 20:15–16). Some have thought that lesbianism is omitted because such relations do not entail physical union or lead to the "spilling of seed."

Culture

Personally, I think it is important to remember the culture of the people at the time The Torah was written. Men often had more than one wife and a wife was to obey and please her husband sexually. Relationships were not monogamous, as we think of marriages today. Thus, it is likely that the

marital bed in ancient Judaism may have had more than two people in it at a time. Polygamy was the norm. However, a woman did not have more than one husband.

Ruth and Lesbian Undertones in Torah

While The Torah does not mention lesbian activity explicitly, **the book of Ruth (https://biblehub.com/ruth/)** has been **seen by many Biblical Scholars as hinting at a lesbian love affair. (https://whosoever.org/ruth-and-naomi-relationship-between-women-in-bible/)** While Ruth is Naomi's daughter-in-law, Ruth's words of desperation, in Ruth 1:16, **sound like modern-day wedding vows. (https://www.patheos.com/blogs/reclaimingthetruth/wp-admin/post.php?post=618&action=edit)**

"16But Ruth replied:

"Do not urge me to leave you

or to turn from following you.

For wherever you go, I will go,

and wherever you live, I will live;

your people will be my people,

and your God will be my God.

17Where you die, I will die,

and there I will be buried.

May the LORD punish me,

and ever so severely,

if anything but death

separates you and me."

Scholars also note the Hebrew word used when Ruth clings to Naomi is the same word used for Adam clinging to Eve in sexual union. That word is dabaq. Whatever the nature of the relationship between these two women, Ruth's words have gone down in Jewish history as the ideal form of love and loyalty.

Therefore, while The Torah provides no law against lesbian activities, it may offer a picture of a beautiful same-sex love between women. So, if The Torah mentions lesbians at all it is in an accepting and respectful manner. They are the ideal of love.

What Does Judaism Say About Lesbians?

What Does Conservative and Reform Judaism Say About Lesbians?

Because there is no prohibition against lesbians in The Torah, Rabbis have been more lenient overall about the subject than they are about male homosexuality. Lesbianism has been seen as more of a taboo than something forbidden outright. That is to say, it is not encouraged, but if it happens it is not a call for total exclusion from the community. **Frederick E. Greenspahn (https://saupj.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/homosexuality-bible.pdf)** said, "Whatever the reason, the lack of a biblical prohibition against female homosexual behavior allowed the rabbis to be more
lenient in that case than with males."

Within Conservative and Reform communities the law against homosexuality has been more lenient in recent years. Many synagogues now have gay and lesbian Rabbis. In these communities, male homosexuality is viewed as a bigger problem than female homosexuality because the prohibition in Leviticus is specific to men. The communities have become more accepting of both, however, noting that The Torah only speaks against one particular behavior and not a person or their sexual preference.

What Does Orthodox Judaism Say About Lesbians?

Unfortunately, The Orthodox have a different view. In Orthodox Judaism, they still understand homosexuality, both in males and females, to be a direct Torah violation. While a conversation has begun within the community, the resounding answer has been that homosexuality is forbidden.

Orthodoxy is very concerned with the continuation of a Jewish community. For this reason within Orthodox Judaism women who choose same-sex relationships are often looked down on more than gay men. **Rachel Shapiro Safran (https://scholarship.shu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2809&context=dissertations)** wrote,

"Despite the
fact that research has indicated that heterosexual people's attitudes toward gay men tend to be more negative than those toward lesbian women (Capitanio, 1999; Kite & Whitley,

> 1996), the opposite argument has been made in regards to Orthodox Jews. Many argue that among Orthodox Jews, attitudes towards lesbian women are more negative than attitudes towards gay men (Dworkin, 1997; Mark, 2008)."

What Is The Real Reason For The Orthodox's View of Lesbians?

The reason is that Orthodox Rabbis believe women should be producing and raising Jewish children. **Safran (https://scholarship.shu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2809&context=dissertations)** wrote,

> "Despite the clear Biblical and Talmudic prohibitions that many Orthodox leaders and authorities use in supporting their stance on homosexuality, many Orthodox gays and 8lesbian individuals sense that the real block against redefining the halachic ruling on homosexuality has not been the explicit language in the Torah, Talmud, and rabbinical commentaries, especially since historically, the commentaries did not seem to be as harsh (Ariel, 2007). Rather, "the origin seems to be nested in the cultural biases of a conservative community that promotes "family values," wants to see its sons and daughters married and producing children, and has little appreciation for "alternative lifestyles"

Conclusion: What Does The Torah Say About Lesbians?

So, what does The Torah have to say about lesbians? Nothing. Not one word. What does the Jewish community say about lesbians? For the most part, lesbians are accepted. However, The Orthodox community remains steadfast in their belief that all homosexuality is wrong. Let us pray for a day when all Jews will be accepted in all sects of Judaism. If G-d did not condemn something, who is mankind to condemn it? Are we greater in authority than Hashem or Torah? Nay.